

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Statement

Statement By Congressman Jim Gibbons Before the Subcommittee on Forest and Forest Health Regarding S. 439 May 3, 2000

Madam Chairman:

I would like to thank you and this committee for allowing me to testify on a noncontroversial bill that was introduced by Senator Bryan and passed the Senate on November 11, 1999 by unanimous consent. This bill adjusts the boundary of the Toiyabe National Forest in Douglas County, Nevada.

As you may know, the National Forest and Public Lands Nevada Enhancement Act of 1988, PL. 100-550, established Highway 395 through Carson Valley, Nevada as the boundary line between the United States Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

This was done because it was determined the boundary would improve management efficiency between the two agencies.

Although this may have been a wise decision at the time, much has changed in the Carson Valley since 1988. Now, through pro-community and environmental developments many new ideas and solutions have been explored.

One of these ideas is to purchase conservation easements on several private ranches to preserve the beauty and overall lifestyle in the Carson Valley.

Due to high growth, the easy pace of life and the close proximity to our State capitol, many people have realized the personal and family opportunities that lie within this area.

As we all know, when space is limited and extremely desirable, something must give. However, to protect this area and its way of life, certain precautions must be taken to ensure its future.

That is why many private property owners have talked to the BLM and discussed the purchase of their agricultural conservation easements.

No one wants to see the beautiful farms in the Carson Valley turned into condominiums nor do they want to see the federal government purchase this property and let it wither into sand and weeds.

This agreement could be a win - win for everyone in the valley.

The environment would be protected, growth would be controlled and the county would still continue to receive private property taxes to fund their schools, roads, police and judicial system.

Some would ask if the ranchers want to sell their agriculture easements then what's stopping them.

This question demonstrates the very need for this bill because the ranchers in the eastern part of the Valley can straightforwardly participate in this type of initiative, while their western counterparts, together with the BLM, must enter into somewhat nebulous "memorandums of understanding" with the Forest Service.

This is not the idea of management efficiency that we were striving for in the original act.

The Forest Service's own management plan, subsequent to the passage of PL. 100-550, does not mention nor "sanction" this type of program concerning conservation easements.

S. 439 will allow these private individuals to deal with only one federal agency, to work in a federal - private partnership that achieves the necessary goals I outlined above.

It is also important to note that this boundary adjustment only affects private land and does not involve the transfer of any public land from the Forest Service to the BLM.

The State of Nevada, Douglas County and its private property owners are all in strong support of this legislation. As is the Forest Service who wrote in a letter to the Douglas County Commissioners, "We support the boundary adjustment... the adjustment will enable Douglas County to work with one federal agency in acquiring the easements."

I would like to thank you again for listening to the concerns of Nevada and to their support for this legislation.

With that Madam Chairman I will yield back the balance of my time and answer any questions you may have.

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